



A great place to live, work and visit



Leader's Statement to Annual Council May 2024



Terry Richardson
Leader, Blaby District Council

This past year has been filled with both opportunities and challenges for Blaby District. We've adopted our new Blaby District Plan, which will guide our course and vision for the next four years, while reflecting on our achievements over the previous four years. If you haven't had a chance to review it yet, I encourage you to do so. Some notable highlights include our strides in achieving Net Zero, the development of new walking and cycling routes, and the successful delivery of community grants.

Looking ahead, our focus remains on ensuring that Blaby District is a vibrant and welcoming place to live, work, and visit. Already this year, we've made significant progress by providing accommodation for our most vulnerable residents through the purchase of 15 new properties to support the homeless. Additionally, we've published our new Economic Development Strategy and enhanced facilities at our leisure centres, including expanded parking and a new soft play area at Enderby Leisure Centre.

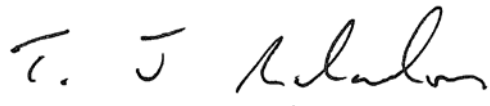
This annual statement underscores our ongoing commitment to addressing climate change, supporting our communities, and driving economic development while ensuring sustainable services for our customers. Through a strategic approach to commerciality and financial sustainability, we strive to meet the evolving needs of our communities. This year, we've developed a Transformation Strategy to future-proof our services amidst ongoing financial challenges.

Despite challenges, we've continued to excel in leading partnerships on behalf of other Leicestershire authorities, prioritising efficient and customer-focused service delivery. Our Lightbulb and Housing Enablement Teams have played crucial roles in supporting residents across Leicester and Leicestershire to live independently and assisting those transitioning home after hospital stays. Additionally, the Leicestershire Building Control Partnership continues to offer services beyond our district boundary to the following district and borough councils of Hinckley and Bosworth, Harborough, Melton, Oadby and Wigston, and Rutland County Council.

Over the past year, we've welcomed new councillors following the May 2023 elections and witnessed some stepping away, all united in our commitment to advancing Blaby District. We've also restructured our Senior Leadership Team to ensure effective delivery of our plans going forward. While proud of our achievements, we recognise there is much work ahead, especially as we begin

to implement our new four-year corporate plan. As always, we approach these challenges with determination and ambition, embodying the 'Blaby Way' by placing our customers at the heart of all we do.

I extend my thanks to all officers and members who have contributed to the accomplishments highlighted in this statement and who continue to work tirelessly to enhance Blaby District's quality of life. I eagerly await the challenges and opportunities of the coming year and remain committed to delivering the best for our residents.



Councillor Terry Richardson
Leader of the Council



ENABLING OUR COMMUNITIES AND SUPPORTING OUR VULNERABLE RESIDENTS

◆ Improving walking and cycling routes

Improving local walking and cycling routes is a top priority for us. We're pleased to report progress on a £1.2 million project connecting our communities, including New Lubbesthorpe and Braunstone Town, to Meridian Leisure Park and Leicester City.

We're working with Leicester City Council to establish safe pathways for pedestrians and cyclists to reach these destinations. The new Meridian Access Point, opened in June last year, allows residents of Braunstone Town to easily access Meridian Leisure Park on foot or bike between the cinema and Chiquito restaurant. This route has become quite popular since its opening.



◆ Helping residents during the cost-of-living crisis

Many residents are facing financial hardship due to rising expenses in energy, food, and transportation. To assist the most vulnerable, we implemented support strategies, including:

- Continued operation of Wellbeing Hubs in partnership with Beacon Care at Whetstone, Sapcote, and Braunstone to provide practical community mental health support.
- Conducted outreach events using the All is Well van, offering health checks, advice, and resources.
- Introduced a Community Fridge at St Crispin's Church in Braunstone Town, providing free surplus food to those in need, donated by stores and individuals.

◆ Discount schemes on green initiatives

We're proud to offer residents several green initiative discount schemes that not only save money but also take advantage of the latest green technology, promoting sustainability:

- We support the Big Community Switch energy auction through iChoosr, enabling residents to secure competitive, green energy tariffs from trusted suppliers. The more participants, the better the deals available, and with a focus on 100% renewable energy it helps towards our goal of being carbon neutral by 2050.
- Through the Solar Together scheme, residents can access cost-effective solar panel installations from vetted suppliers, leveraging group buying power with iChoosr.
- Additionally, we're involved in a government-funded program to assist energy-poor households, providing Home Upgrade Grants to improve inefficient heating systems and reduce carbon emissions. Upgrades range from insulation and heat pumps to smart heating controls and LED lighting, contributing to a greener community.

◆ Storm Henk response

At the start of 2024, Storm Henk had devastating effects on parts of our District.

Over 150 homes experienced external or internal flooding, forcing some residents to evacuate and cope with extensive property damage and loss of belongings.

This was the worst flooding incident on record in the District, with the highest ever recorded river levels and widespread trauma for the affected families. Despite the challenges our Council responded admirably:

Customer service staff were exceptional in obtaining information to allow both Councillors and officers to go out across the District, checking on families, offering practical help and providing signposting advice.

We assisted affected households by removing bulky items, collecting extra waste and deploying street sweepers to clear debris and mud. Collaborative efforts with other local authorities and agencies ensured a co-ordinated response, including assistance with government financial support applications for residents.



◆ Kirby Muxloe gas outage

In February 2024, a burst water main led to hundreds of residents in Kirby Muxloe losing their gas supply after water leaked into the Cadent gas mains pipe in the neighbouring village of Ratby.

Again, our teams worked with other local authorities and agencies as Cadent worked to expel the water from the pipes and restore gas supplies.

Staff dedicated their evenings and weekends to door knocking and providing an information point and local command centre at Kirby Muxloe Village Hall.

The reaction to these incidents was once more an illustration of how we pull together as a Council and a shining example of the 'Blaby way.'



◆ Community Awards

I had the honour of hosting our annual Community Awards in January, celebrating unsung heroes who make a difference in our communities:

Volunteer of the Year was awarded to Suzann Miller, Sharon Denston and Kim Frain for their exceptional support of Ukrainian refugees locally.

Alleah Benson was the Young Volunteer of the Year, chosen thanks to dedicated and longstanding support of Stoney Stanton Youth Club and the village carnival, since childhood, and balancing this commitment alongside her job.



Sapcote Memory Hub won Community Group of the Year, receiving 599 out of nearly 2000 votes. They support those affected by dementia and their families.

John Harrison received a special recognition award for his outstanding volunteer efforts at Narborough train station, bringing in significant funding and improvements post-retirement from the railways.

◆ **New supported affordable housing**

Together with Homes England we have partially grant funded a new development of 11 one-bed apartments, providing specialist supported housing for adults with complex needs including mental health and substance misuse.

The site at The Villers in Whetstone is part of a 78 unit all affordable housing development and is being delivered by EMH Homes.

The supported provision is the first affordable supported housing scheme to be brought forward in the District for some time and has been five years in the making with our Strategic Housing Team closely involved to progress the scheme and bring it to fruition – a great achievement.



◆ **Blaby village centre toilets open**

Our long-awaited ambition to bring modern, fully accessible toilet facilities back to Blaby village was finally achieved in September.

The new block replaces the old brick building on Johns Court car park and features a Changing Places unit which has specialised equipment to cater for severely disabled children or adults who need assistance in their personal care as well as a standard accessible toilet.

The block has an environmentally friendly natural sedum plant roof and thanks to its smaller footprint two extra disabled parking spaces have been created immediately adjacent.

We worked hard to bring this project to fruition for the benefit of residents and visitors.

◆ **Investment in housing to provide new homes for homeless households**

The Council has continued to progress the acquisition of 16 new properties which will be used to house homeless households. This will reduce the reliance on B&B accommodation, which is considered unsuitable, particularly for families.

So far 15 of the new units have been acquired and these are currently being fitted out with fixtures and furnishings. The properties will be ready for the first occupants by the beginning of June. It is hoped that the final property will be purchased soon with the intention that it will be used for a refugee family from the Afghan Resettlement Scheme.

The project is funded by a £1.38m grant from the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities and £2.5m of investment from the Council.



ENHANCING AND MAINTAINING OUR NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

◆ New Lubbethorpe milestones

Our award-winning community at New Lubbethorpe continues to develop:

- Phase 2 is well underway, adding 163 more homes and beginning construction on a local centre with retail units, a café and bistro, a GP surgery and a care home.
- Provision for wildlife including bird and bat boxes and hedgehog highways will be included in the expansion.
- Over 1,000 homes are now occupied – almost a quarter of the expected total number of houses on the site, with the first houses fitted with solar panels.



◆ Hinckley National Freight Interchange examination

Last year was incredibly challenging for us as a Council, particularly our planning team as we dealt with the examination of the Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange scheme by the Planning Inspectorate.

We've openly opposed this 662-acre warehouse and rail hub development, citing concerns about its impact on the countryside and increased traffic congestion affecting our communities district wide.

As a statutory consultee we've submitted official documents, attended and spoken at hearings and have made our final comments to the Planning Inspectorate. They will review all information and evidence before making a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport who will ultimately decide if the scheme will go ahead. We expect the decision in the autumn.



◆ Improvements to facilities at Enderby Leisure Centre

In partnership with Everyone Active, we have made significant improvements to our facilities at Enderby Leisure Centre.

We invested £188,000 to expand the car park by 50 spaces, totalling 279 overall. Everyone Active invested £300,000 on the installation of a new soft play area in the sports hall featuring slides, crawl tubes and a sports arena.

Opened in December the soft play, which is in the main sports hall, has proved a huge hit with families.



◆ **Revised Fosse Villages Neighbourhood Plan adopted**

In January, we formally adopted a revised Fosse Villages Neighbourhood Plan following consultation and independent examination. The revised plan includes protected open areas. These had been deleted during the original review, primarily because the independent examiner felt there was a lack of supporting evidence.

It's pleasing to see communities work together to forge a vision for the future of their locality and provide the extra evidence needed to ensure green spaces are protected.

Following national planning guidelines and working with communities means we can continue to enhance and maintain both our natural and built environment.

GROWING AND SUPPORTING OUR ECONOMY

◆ Economic Development Framework

Towards the end of last year we launched our Economic Development Framework, setting out a vision for the District to thrive by supporting and promoting business growth and development.

The Framework has five priority themes, supporting local business and innovation, shaping our work and skills agenda, growing and supporting the green economy, building pride in place and identifying investable propositions.

Our regular Business Breakfast meetings and Job Fairs already offer valued support and new initiatives include exploring boosting the District's tourism offering, increasing visitor numbers and accommodation options and signposting to expert advisers including the Leicestershire Business Advice Service, provided through consultants Exemplas.

◆ Fosse Foxes competition

Our Fosse Foxes Tourism Trail has proved a big hit since launching in 2021, showcasing the wonderful attractions we have here in our District. The hand painted Fosse Foxes sculptures were designed by local artists Pickle Illustration alongside our tourism partnership. Each fox is located at a place of interest and bears a symbol relating to that location.

Last summer our team at Visit Blaby District ran a competition around the Fosse Foxes once more and the tourism hotspots they highlight. Visitors were encouraged to take a selfie with their favourite fox and post it on social media with the tags @visitblaby and #fossefoxes. In return they were entered into a draw to win a unique, handcrafted toy Fosse Fox, from the talented crafters at Gather, Create, Grow, the people behind Cosby Yarn Bomb.

This was a real example of how we can work together with our own communities to promote Blaby as a great place to visit, supporting and boosting our economy.

◆ Summer tourism success

There are some fantastic events, festivals and celebrations which take place in our District and last year we were able to shout out about both an increase in visitor numbers and visitor spend. A huge bounce back from the obvious dip during Covid and a great boost to our economy.

Among the highlights were GlastonBlaby, a brilliant fundraising day of music and entertainment, The Victory Show which attracted 15,000 visitors from across the UK and the world to see history brought to life with WWII vehicles, battle re-enactments and a 1940s themed dinner dance and of course Cosby Yarn Bomb which pulled in an amazing 20,000 visitors over its three weeks of handcrafted creative art installation displays.

Our own Ice House tours were also successful with dozens of people visiting the historic landmark in Bouskell Park and extra dates added due to demand. The tours, their promotion and the safeguarding of the Ice House thanks to the restoration project also earned us a place as a finalist in the Leicestershire and Rutland Heritage Awards for the Protecting Heritage category.



Bluebell Park in Glen Parva played host to our summer family friendly community fair which saw more than 20 local businesses involved as well as our Health and Leisure Team.

We aimed to offer fun activities, music and games along with advice and information on our own services and support initiatives in Glen Parva. A great time was had by all and congratulations went to everyone involved in making it such a success.

◆ **PM visits District**

In September our Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak visited the headquarters of Topps Tiles at Grove Park, Enderby, as part of his regular PM Connect events.

Thanks to an invite from the offices of our local MP, Aberto Costa, representatives from the Council, including Chief Executive Julia Smith, Chairman Cheryl Cashmore and her consort and Councillors, Ben Taylor, Nigel Grundy and Susan Findlay were among those who attended.

When asked a question of local government by Julia Smith, the PM said he recognised the value of District Councils such as Blaby and the positive impact they have on communities. It was an honour to have the Prime Minister in our District and be able to hear his feedback on questions from both our Council leaders and local people.

◆ **Taste the Place launch**

In collaboration with Visit Leicester in January we launched Taste the Place, a campaign aimed at promoting the best local independent producers, restaurants, cafes, delis, farms shops, pubs and more to showcase the breadth and diversity of both the District's and the region's food and drink offer.

We now have a Blaby District 'Taste Adventure Map' highlighting a selection of our award-winning and unique food and drink businesses plus a fun video and a new dedicated section on the Visit Blaby District website.

The initiative not only seeks to entice more people, whether local or from afar, to try out what our food and drink businesses have to offer but also to provide a networking platform for the businesses themselves.



AMBITIOUS AND WELL MANAGED COUNCIL, VALUING OUR PEOPLE

◆ Blaby Planning Team wins award

In June our amazing team in planning took the honour of East Midlands Local Planning Authority of the Year in the Royal Town Planning Institute Awards for Planning Excellence 2023.

In taking the award the judges were impressed by the team's work in the four areas of service – planning policy, planning enforcement, development management and strategic growth.

It was well deserved recognition of the dedication our team shows, often in challenging and intense circumstances.

◆ Kings Fund identifies BDC as Best Practice

A report from the Kings Fund in July which focused on driving better outcomes with integrated care systems identified our Lightbulb and Housing Enablement Team (HET) as best practice.

The report focused on the valuable role District Councils play in health, being able to influence the wider determinants of health, act and react quickly and utilise their close connections with local communities.

In its recommendations the report centred on creating opportunities for District Councils to lead with systems-based approaches and place-based projects – hence the use of Lightbulb and HET as an example which works in exactly that way.

I was at the launch of the report and it was great to see Blaby DC recognised for leading the way in this arena.

◆ Work experience candidates welcomed

During the summer we were pleased to welcome a number of work experience candidates who visited different departments to get an idea of how the council and its officers work.

Teams were enthusiastic in sharing knowledge and experience. One of the young people had a particular interest in business growth so the Community, Business, Work and Skills Team made sure they spent time with them explaining about the types of support available to local businesses.

The candidate attended one of our regular Business Breakfasts and was able to network with District business leaders and chat to Councillor Les Phillimore, learning about the Federation of Small Businesses and his personal knowledge of the sector.

◆ Carbon footprint continues to improve

As a Council we are committed to reducing our carbon emissions and using hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) has been instrumental in achieving an impressive 80% reduction in emissions compared to our baseline year.

In the next few months, we'll report our latest statistics, using carbon emissions accounting tools, expecting further reductions due to our fleet's full year of HVO usage.

Our mission is to be net zero by 2030 and while HVO has been a highly successful move we strive to do more. In the longer term we are hoping to embark on an ambitious project to install electric charging infrastructure at our depot as we look to transition our fleet.



◆ Member Development Strategy

Ensuring our Councillors can respond to the ever-evolving challenges facing our District has inspired us to create a fresh Member Development Strategy for the next four years.

This sets out a vision for continuous learning, ensuring our Councillors have the knowledge and skills required to lead our communities.

We want to strengthen the skills and competencies needed by elected Members in the modern world, including effective communications, community leadership and digital competencies.

◆ New Corporate Plan

A major piece of work for us this past financial year has been to produce our new Corporate Plan, which we proudly call our Blaby District Plan 2024-28. This document charts a course for enhancing Blaby District, and it goes beyond being solely a Council initiative. It represents an inclusive journey which involves our residents, businesses, the voluntary sector, communities and partner organisations.

In the coming years it is inevitable Blaby District will undergo significant change. Our population will grow, commuting patterns will shift and businesses will evolve. This Plan lays the foundation for us to shape a prosperous and sustainable future, preserving the character of Blaby District and maximising opportunities for everyone.



◆ Youth Council campaign brings top level recognition and TV interest

We promote interest in politics and local government among young people through our Youth Council.

At last year's Youth Council conference attendees wrote letters to local MP, Alberto Costa, highlighting their concerns about vaping and how vapes were being targeted at young children.

Mr Costa wrote back, saying the Government had listened to the points outlined in their letters and would be closing a loophole that allows shops to offer free vape samples to children. He said there would also be tougher fines for shops illegally selling vapes to children and that the dangers of vaping would be included in the school curriculum.

This success sparked the interest of the BBC, leading to media coverage that included Youth Council members Nathan and Reuben on the issue of vaping, along with our Youth Council Champion Councillor Adrian Clifford.



◆ UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) provided £2.6 billion in funding to be invested by March 2025 to address inequalities and enhance opportunities nationwide. Blaby District Council received over £2.1 million in late 2022 from this fund.

Over the past two years, several projects have been funded, including:

- Installation of CCTV in Blaby Town Centre and at Narborough Railway Station, leading to reduced crime and antisocial behaviour.
- Participation in the Queens Green Canopy initiative, which distributed 2,100 trees to the local community to advance Net Zero commitments.
- Creation of new job roles to address domestic abuse, homelessness, business growth, and community activities.
- Implementation of mental health support in schools, offering personalised support for students dealing with anxiety and other issues.

◆ New Transformation Strategy

Approved by Cabinet Executive in November 2023 Transforming Blaby Together is our over-arching response to the challenges that we face as a council. The world is changing around us, and we need to adapt. The Strategy is designed to enable the authority to adopt a culture of continuous improvement, grasping opportunities and different ways of working to drive operational effectiveness and efficiencies. There are four key themes at the core of strategy delivery, Customers At Our Heart, Prioritise Digital, Challenge The Way We Work and Financial Resilience. Each key theme is influencing a range of projects and service deliverables across the council which will support delivery of the broader Blaby District Plan.

◆ Progress with our performance framework

We've made significant progress with our performance framework. A structure has been established for managing and sharing projects, measures, and risks across the Council based on priorities.

In the fourth quarter of 2022/2023, we invested in and developed an online platform to enhance visibility and management of these elements. This investment has positively impacted awareness, business planning, and decision-making processes.

Moving forward, our focus remains on refining the framework to more closely align operational activities with the corporate aims and objectives outlined in the Blaby District Plan. This ongoing development aims to establish clear connections between day-to-day activities and our overarching strategic goals.

KEEPING YOU SAFE AND HEALTHY

◆ Raising awareness of 'clean air'

On National Clean Air Day (15 June) our Environmental Services Team visited local primary schools, Greystoke, Sharnford Primary and The Pastures to raise awareness about pollution and clean air.

The team encouraged Active Travel walk-to-school group walks during each visit and provided fun resources such as a word search and design a superhero challenge.

The aim was to inspire the younger generation to play a part in reducing pollution levels by making greener lifestyle and travel choices.

As a Council we are committed to cutting pollution in our District. Clean air benefits our physical health and the environment but also because it can help protect our mental and brain health. The physical impacts of pollution on health – such as asthma, heart disease and cancers – have been recognised for decades.



◆ Council acts on improving air quality

Last year we were able to seek removal of three Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) in the District, Narborough Road South, the B4114 in Enderby and Narborough and Enderby Road in Whetstone. These areas, previously declared AQMA's due to high nitrogen dioxide levels from traffic emissions, consistently showed nitrogen dioxide levels well below Government limits over the past five years. The Government has recently approved the removal of the AQMA designations.

We installed Zephyr air quality monitoring stations at various sites in villages across the District as part of a new Government-backed project, Particulates Matter. Funded with £151,000 from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the project aims to monitor levels of some of the finest pollution particles like dust, dirt, smoke and soot.

Levels are being made available online so people can check their local air quality and make informed decisions about their own activities and behaviours which might impact those levels.



◆ Successful exercise scheme

In January the JUST Get Involved programme returned to Blaby District for the eighth year, working in partnership with Oadby and Wigston and Harborough District Council.

The JUST programme aims to encourage and empower women aged 18 plus to be more active by signposting them to local instructor sessions and offering rewards for attendance such as discounts and branded T-shirts as well as free give-aways.

The programme had a record number of sign-ups this time round with almost 800 women registering to take part across the three local authority areas.

Running for nine weeks from 15 January to 7 March the scheme allowed access to more than 100 activity sessions. The registrations translated into hundreds of women who otherwise might not have thought about getting involved with exercise taking part in regular activity – a huge success.



◆ **Active Blaby older adults' physical activity programmes**

Our Active Blaby team do a grand job helping to keep our residents fit and healthy with their work among older adults being particularly important.

Over the last year the team successfully delivered 24-week Steady Steps falls prevention programmes in Enderby, Kirby Muxloe, Braunstone Town, Whetstone, Sapcote and Blaby, supporting our most vulnerable residents who have a history of or fear of falling.

Through their weekly community-based classes running across the District they have recorded 5,376 attendances and supported more than 330 older adults to improve and maintain their strength, balance, health and independence.

The team received 420 referrals to an activity scheme run at Enderby Leisure Centre aimed at supporting those with long-term health conditions to be more active. From those referrals 88 people joined the programme. Of those who completed the programme, 87% said their health had improved and 56% agreed they made fewer visits to their doctor or healthcare professional.

◆ **Works on contaminated land**

We continue to face challenges posed by areas of our District which were once used as landfill sites. Extra funding was provided in October to support additional remediation at the Huncote Leisure Centre site as well as two other areas which had been identified.

In January we carried out borehole drilling and sampling at these two sites, a parcel of land to the rear of Sandhill Drive and the Southey Close recreation ground, both in Enderby. The report from the consultants is guiding our plans.

Mitigation measures are ensuring landfill gas levels are stabilising at Huncote and now much of the site is open.

Plans for the long-term use of the site will be discussed later in the Council agenda.

